

# Glacier Country Kayaks Sustainability Policy

## **1. Overview**

### **1.1: About us:**

Glacier Country Kayaks is a small, family owned and operated eco-tourism Company located in Franz Josef, South Westland, New Zealand. We provide guided tours on Lake Mapourika, situated in Westland Tai Poutini National Park, where we explore the Okarito Kiwi Sanctuary – home to the rarest species of Kiwi, the Rowi.

### **1.2: The policy:**

This policy outlines the commitment Glacier Country Kayaks has to sustainable eco-tourism and environmentally sustainable practice.

### **1.3: Eco tourism:**

Eco tourism is broadly defined, but generally includes the following aspects:

- Is nature or heritage based
- Acts in a sustainable way and attempts to help clients to minimise the impacts of their visit
- Benefits the indigenous community
- Has an interpretative dimension
- Education<sup>1</sup>

### **1.4: Sustainable tourism:**

Sustainable tourism and eco-tourism are sometimes used inter-changeably. A definition provided by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation reflects our approach to the concept:

- Tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. The objective of sustainable tourism is to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or mitigating any undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Sustainable Practices**

Glacier Country Kayaks currently employs a number of practices which demonstrate a commitment to eco and sustainable tourism.

### **2.1: Recycling:**

Glacier Country Kayaks has an extensive recycling system. We work with Westland Recycling, our local transfer centre, to recycle some plastics, tins and cans, cardboard and glass bottles.

We recycle all soft plastics as part of the Love NZ Soft Plastics Programme

(<https://www.recycling.kiwi.nz/solutions/soft-plastics/>)

We encourage our staff and customers to reduce waste production by, for example, using reusable cups for coffee and refusing single-use plastic bags when going to the local supermarket.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://tpp.ac.nz/study-options/eco-tourism/what-is-ecotourism/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/sustour-define.html>

## **2.2: New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment:**

The New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment aims to see every New Zealand tourism business committed to sustainability by 2025. The Commitment's vision is "Leading the World in Sustainable Tourism".

From the website, the commitment states that "...we must achieve ambitious economic goals while sharing the overwhelming benefits with supportive host communities, contributing to restoring, protecting and enhancing our natural environment, and continuing to be a high quality destination of choice for domestic and international travellers." See <http://sustainabletourism.nz/about-us/about-sustainable-tourism-commitment/components/> for details of both industry and business goals the commitment involves.

Glacier Country Kayaks signed up to the commitment in February 2018.

## **2.3: Environmental Education/Interpretation:**

A key premise of Glacier Country Kayaks' sustainable practice lies in the environmental interpretation and education that occurs on each kayak tour. It is widely agreed throughout the world that fostering public use of natural resources and environments allows understanding and enjoyment which inevitably leads to appreciation, respect and care.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, interpretation, when properly prepared and delivered, can enhance the visitor experience and assist with the conservation of the environments in which tourism companies operate.<sup>4</sup>

Glacier Country Kayaks embraces the opportunity for environmental education. Guides are trained to provide education and interpretation on a variety of topics, some of which include environmental issues. Interpretation topics which include some form of environmental education covered by guides include but are not limited to:

- Basic glaciology (including reasons for advance/retreat, global warming, natural patterns etc)
- Impact of colonisation on flora and fauna
  - Felling of native bush
  - Introduction of pests and predators
- Water quality
- Pest control methods
- Impact of tourism on biodiversity
- Preservation of fragile ecosystems
- Conservation projects (e.g. Operation Nest Egg, local volunteering)

Guides are trained to engage in these discussions from a neutral position and explore both positive and negative aspects. Providing interpretation and environmental education is a skill which requires empathy and judgement. Guides are encouraged to use these skills when delivering interpretation and education in order to give an optimal experience for the customer.

## **2.4: Department of Conservation concession:**

Tourism concessions allow the private sector to operate commercially in New Zealand's conservation areas. The concession system allows the Department of Conservation ensure that

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<sup>3</sup> Dias, R. 2010. <http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10063/1329/thesis.pdf?sequence=1>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

activities are in line with their primary goal of protecting the land and other resources, as well as making sure that services and facilities provided to tourists are of a suitable standard.<sup>5</sup>

As the only commercial operator authorised to operate on Lake Mapourika, Glacier Country Kayaks pays a concession to the Department of Conservation for each trip. Concession fees are invested back into the conservation estate.<sup>6</sup>

### **2.5: Waste management in conservation areas:**

The management of human waste is a challenge for all tourism businesses who operate in remote locations. Glacier Country Kayaks tries to avoid the need to deal with human waste by using toilet facilities both at the office in town as well as at the kayak launch site where a Department of Conservation maintained toilet is located. Glacier Country Kayaks however acknowledges the need to be prepared for the responsible disposal of human waste. Regarding the disposal of waste, the New Zealand Leave No Trace guidelines suggest to:

“Minimise the impact of toilet waste Never miss an opportunity to use a proper toilet facility and don’t dispose of your rubbish in them. Although the topic of human waste can be an uncomfortable issue with groups in the outdoors, it is very important to address it directly. If you must poo in the outdoors, do so in a hole dug 10–15 cm deep at least 50 m (100 steps) from water, campsites, and tracks. This will promote decomposition of the waste and reduce the likelihood that others may have unpleasant encounters. Cover and disguise the hole when you are finished and be sure to pack out all hygiene products in a plastic bag.”<sup>7</sup>

It was recently decided that it was not realistic to dispose of waste according to the above requirements due to the location and time restraints of trips. Thus, Glacier Country Kayaks has now adopted a new practice for managing human waste on trips. Two 20 litre, sealable buckets have been placed at an accessible and central point on the lake shore and, if required, clients or staff can access buckets to relieve themselves in. The waste is then carried out of the conservation area and disposed of in toilets at office in town. Buckets are disinfected and reused.

## **3. Future actions and recommendations**

### **3.1: Pest Control**

In early 2018 Glacier Country Kayaks looked into gaining funding from different businesses and community groups to set up a trapping network both up the stream and on the peninsular where the walk component of the kayak and walk trip takes place. Funding proved difficult and the project was put on hold at the beginning of June 2018. It is recommended that this project is picked up again in the future as a network of traps would provide a valuable education experience for customers as well as having obvious benefits for pest control in these areas.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/93585663/doc-earns-17m-from-concession-fees-and-sharpens-its-commercial-skills>

<sup>7</sup> New Zealand Leave No Trace

[http://www.leavenotrace.org.nz/uploads/files/lnt\\_nz\\_booklet\\_a6\\_ed3\\_web.pdf](http://www.leavenotrace.org.nz/uploads/files/lnt_nz_booklet_a6_ed3_web.pdf)

